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12/29/78

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

DATE: December 29, 1978

SUBJECT : Political Parties Discussion Amnesty

PARTICIPANTS: Dr. Augusto Conte MacDonell, Vice President of the Argentine Social Democrat Party and Member of the Executive Board of the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights
Dr. Emilio Mignone, Vice President of the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights
Mr. F. Allen Harris, Political Officer, American Embassy, Buenos Aires

COPIES TO : ARA/ECA - Mr. Bumpus AMB
HA/HR - Mr. Flood DCM
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DAO

Dr. Augusto Conte MacDonell (protect), Vice President of the Argentine Social Democrat Party and member of the Executive Board of the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights said that an amnesty proposal was becoming a key part of discussions of political normalization among Argentine politicians. These discussions were being undertaken seriously by Argentine politicians as a consequence of the visible decline (desgaste) of Videla's and Viola's power bases.

Conte said that an amnesty law for the members of the military who had engaged in operations against subversives and terrorists, was becoming accepted as a condition precedent to political normalization. Everyone recognized that one of the

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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

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major impediments to political normalization was the well founded fear among the thousands of military officers who had taken part in the "dirty war" that legal action might be taken against them personally in the future.

The politicians who were examining the normalization problem in depth believed that some type of legal assurance had to be given to the military that no Nuremburg-type trials would ever be conducted in Argentina for action in the anti-subversive campaign before the military would relinquish power. This was seen as a real problem which the civilian Argentine political leadership had to face.

Dr. Emilio Mignone affirmed the importance of the amnesty proposal for progress on human rights issues. Mignone stated that this subject had not yet been discussed within the Permanent Assembly which was much less advanced politically than the traditional parties. Mignone expressed the necessity for an amnesty both to get information regarding the "desaparecidos" and to give the military the confidence necessary to release the hundreds of clandestine prisoners they presently hold. He noted that many of the surviving clandestine prisoners had been co-opted to work for the military and themselves share responsibility for the physical operation of the interrogation and detention facilities.

Both Conte and Mignone expressed the need for USG support for such an amnesty law when it appeared.

Comment: This is the first report the Embassy has received regarding political consideration of an amnesty. If this proposal surfaces from the politicians and human rights activists, it will be an indication of the price they are willing to pay (in advance) to smooth the military's path back to the barracks.

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